OVER THE RAILS TO ST. AUGUSTINE.

A. H.

A cotton mill president, who developed in a few years from a dry-goods salesman to a rich controller of large interests in his line, told me that, if he had a son, or a nephew, or a cousin, who should conceive a notion that he would enter the service of the government or of a large railroad company, he would do all sorts of vile things to him. We were at his suburban home, and in his handsomely furnished working room—or "den," if you please, and the surroundings gave a decided emphasis to the wisdom he uttered. He did not choose the life of a railroad clerk. But I had done so; and, after talking with him, I deliberately re-entered a railroad office—an excellent example of a settled corporation clerk; for I had become so accustomed to the routine of life that I could not keep out of it. What else could I do; what else was I fit for?

The life of a railroad clerk may have a tendency to rob a man of self-reliance, of resourcefulness, of independence, and of many other personal advantages that a commercial man is likely to develop; but there are compensations. If an official is accidentally thrown with you on the street, or in a street car, he may tell you, if there is no person of consequence near to talk to, that some day you may be president of the company. To how many railroad clerks, hard-working and faithful is the dream of becoming president an airy delusion. Yet the juvenile magazines will seize upon a rare instance, and proclaim it an easy possibility; and the fireside journals will emblazon the shining example of what a clerk might become if he is good, and works very hard.

But that is not all. On holidays, if his work permits it, he may travel on passes and see something of the world. And, in all candor, that is a great compensation. I always take a trip on a holiday; and find that there is little difficulty in obtaining leave of absence for another day or two to lengthen the time, if I want it very much.

We are just back from a Thanksgiving trip to St. Augustine, Florida. My wife and I settled upon St. Augustine. We had seen progressive cities, modern cities, north and south, with all their points of interest—their fine buildings, crowded streets, museums, art galleries, etc.——until we were satiated. We wanted a change, and, still, to see something worth while. We would have liked something foreign; but we could not go to Europe or the West Indies and return in two days; nor could we have made a dash into Mexico in so limited a time. Some one suggested St. Augustine: and we looked up a picture of the old city gate, and read the description of the city given below it; and thereupon we were consumed with a desire to see St. Augustine. A city built by the Spaniards; a foreign city on American soil, which has only within a generation really become Americanized.

For ten days we talked about the trip at table. Our little boy caught the contagion, and plied ceaseless questions about the old town; and the baby girl made ludicrous efforts to pronounce the name.

On the afternoon before Thanksgiving we started. We have always had a luck of having fine weather in traveling; and the prospect was most auspicious. The air was balmy—suggestive of Florida; and the sun sank below the pines in a gorgeous blaze, which brought out delicate tints of green and pink throughout the surrounding sky. It was a beautiful picture; and we admired it through the car windows, until we encountered that effective check to all romance of traveling with children—the unceasing call for "something to eat" and water. Night soon settled upon us, and the train clattered along merrily; and little Doris fretted for home. But the Pullman porter, with his impressive dignity, performed his weighty office; and the children were disposed of to keep their nightly vigil in the land of giants and fairies and castles and riches. So that we could think some more of St. Augustine, and look about us at our fellow travelers.

There were many of them. A sad-faced little boy came into the car at a South Carolina station. He dropped into an empty seat, and at once huddled up as if stupefied with drowsiness. There was a smooth-shaven, fair, delicate looking man along with him. He sat opposite the boy, and leaned forward at times to place his ear close to the lad's face, and to feel his pulse. The man's face was not at all anxious. There was something about the two that awoke my curiosity. I learned that the boy was suffering with appendicitis; and the man was a doctor, who was taking him to Charleston to be operated upon the next morning. He said to me, 'That boy's father would not take the world for him. I am going to save his life in the morning. I have operated on seventeen cases of appendicitis this year, and have not lost one patient." He was so cool and confident in his speech that I believed at once that his operation would be successful; and I now feel sure it was; but I have not since heard anything about the case.

The little boy was on the verge of eternity, and to me it was a very solemn moment to stand and look at the sleeping figure of the child, who was the idol of his parents, but who was passing away from them in the grim grasp of disease. His passage across the dark river in a day or two was inevitable, but for the suregon's skillful work. I trust the operation was a success.

These boys of ours are each worth a whole world; but they are a trial to the spirit of man, and a thorn in the flesh, while they are full of exuberance of traveling. The exclamations of interest! The whoops of appreciation! The gymnastics over the seats! The loud questions when the train stops and everything is quiet! The comfort there is in the thought that you are a dire nuisance to fellow travelers for having with you an irrepressible lad! My little boy was not sick; he was alive to the occasion.

When we reached Jacksonville, Florida, Little David was enchained by a strange sight. There were at the railroad station about a dozen Indian girls, wrapped with blankets, which covered one shoulder only, leaving partially exposed waists of coarse cotton materials. There was a gaping crowd around them; and David took a conspicuous stand in the inner circle. He drank in every detail of their person and apparel with an absorbing interest. We were unable to tell him whether they representd the bloody Sioux tribe, or wre Choctaws, Chickasaws, Cherokees or Seminoles, the southern tribes which young students of American history learn to speak of so glibly. We were inclined to call them Seminoles, however, the tribe which figured so conspiscuously in the bloody Indians wars in Florida. Fortunately, we had forgotten details of those wars, and were thus relieved from exciting recitals to David.

There are yet some straggling remnants of the Seminoles in Florida; and the guide books exploit them as a picturesque feature of the landscape. One of them publishes a picture of Dr. Tustanogee, with his two wives and their families. "The "doctor" evidently does not aspire to the United States Senate; and therefore the interesting exhibit of his polygamy is rather harmless.

David's curiosity finally subsided, and we boarded the train for St. Augustine. The coaches were of orange color, which unconsciously gave the feeling that they were indigenous to the soil. There were a large number of tourists on board. Judging by their accent, they were almost altogether from the north. And how eagerly their eyes scanned the forests, farm yards and roadsides for palmettos and banana trees. Many of the passengers were bound for the sumptuous resorts near the southern end of the East Coast railroad; but all over the car we could hear the word "St. Augustine," as one of peculiar interest.

Within an hour we rolled into an orange colored station, with a large orange-colored building at the further end; and we alighted, to enjoy the first glimpse of the oldest town in the United States, but to be besieged and harassed by a swarm of hack drivers and hotel runners. It was Thanksgiving Day; and I don't know whether that fact gave occasion for any special amount of zeal or not, but I do know that when I visit the town again. I want to slip through the old gate in a country mule cart, so that I may escape the notice of these pests. There was one fellow who was a particularly grand and persistent nuisance. He followed us for a long distance, and finally assured me, confidentially, that he had a fine turkey at his hotel cooking especially for us. I yawned at him blankly, and he finally dropped us.

They evidently considered us especially green and gullible, and that, for sheer helplessness, we would bestow our patronage indiscriminately. I suppose we did look a little rustic, as the five of us trailed through the streets; myself doing service behind the little girl's go-cart. We wanted to see the city leisurely, and according to our own innocent wishes; and there we waved aside every proffer of an omnibus or carriage.

When we were able to marshal our wits, we endeavored to get a good view of the situation. Behind the railroad station there was the St. Sebastian river, and nearby was another orange-colored building, which we were told was the railroad company's hospital.

There is a wide, open area toward the east, bounded by a thick growth of trees and shrubbery, which marks the western boundary of the town proper. It would seem that the railroad projectors built well to the west, and reserved for their use a large body of land between the tracks and the houses of the city. It was a wise plan for the pockets of the railroad people.

Immediately in front of the depot and extending towards the city proper is a large, flat, enclosed area, which a negro informed us is the pasture for Mr. Flagler's cows. That was the first mention of H. M. Flagler's name which we heard in St. Augustine, but not the last; for he is lord of the manor, duke of the province, grand mogul and royal proprietor. At St. Augustine and the whole Florida east coast, with its railroad facilities, he is the whole thing. Before the United States secured possession of Florida, it consisted of two districts, East Florida and West Florida; and it is little to be doubted that, at some time in the near future, the old order will obtain again, but the names will be changed to "Flagler" and "Florida."

Mr. Flagler has worked wonders on the east coast of Florida. He has grown very rich, like many others probably at the expense of the people; yet he has spent his riches lavishly in Florida, and everybody has the privilege of enjoying the grandeur his wealth has created, and of feasting on the rich, semi-tropical beauties of forest and stream and ocean-beach which his railroad has made accessible. Would that there were many more such as he, to make our fair Southland blossom in the richness of its unrivalled natural advantages.

We walked along a neat street of tolerable width, leading away from the depot, which gradually unfolded a pleasing vista of the city beyond. We admired two or three handsome residences, surrounded by large, enclosed areas, ornamented with luxuriant oaks, palmettos and other trees. They were restful places, shaded and secluded, and would have excited the envy of any one who loves a pretty home. Then came a low stone wall, surmounted by high pillars, between which swung massive iron chains. Through the trees we caught glimpses of red-tiled, over-hanging roofs, square towers with tiny balconies, and a broad sweep of sunny piazzas; and we knew we were in the majestic presence of the Ponce de Leon, the peerless hotel of the balmy winters. The great building little by little unfolded itself to us as we moved along the side walk towards the large gate. It was magnificent in its symmetrical proportions, graceful arches and general Spanish air. We looked through the huge iron gate, which was locked, awaiting the opening of the season; and feasted our eyes not only upon the details of beauty in the building itself, but also upon the rich profusion of palmettos, palms, banana trees and tropical shrubbery in the court below. Across the street was the Alcazar, the companion hotel. It was large and magnificent, and also of the Spanish type of construction. The Pone de Leon is a large building; but one can hardly gain a good idea of its size by a casual observation; its proportions are so perfect. It occupies four acres of land, and is said to be a half mile in circumference. The effect of the Alcazar is more imposing as to size. It has not the angles and turns and balconies and turrets of the Ponce de Leon.

Then followed a profusion of hotels, villas, boarding houses, all adorned with palms of many varieties, and all shaded and comfortable in appearance; all tasteful, and many of a distinctively foreign type. Nearly every building in the city of any pretension which did not bear the sign "Hotel," was placarded with cards reading "Rooms for Rent," "Furnished Rooms." It was a blot which marred the contemplation of many a cozy, home-like retreat. Time and again we stood in ardent admiration of an exceptionally pretty house and grounds until one of our party discovered the vile legend "Rooms for Rent;" and we passed on. It is a fact. St. Augustine is given over to the greed of catching the golden coins which the numberless northern tourists spend lavishly there every winter. The stores are filled with souvenirs and trinkets which nobody but pleasure-seeking tourists would care to buy. It is estimated that at least 50,000 visitors come to St. Augustine every year, to stay perhaps a few days or, maybe, the entire winter.

We turned into an alley to go in the direction of the "old part" of the city; and, lo, we soon found a signboard with the legend "St. George St." And that was a street! Still we had heard of the narrow streets of St. Augustine. And, compared with others, St. George was a street; and we appreciated its comfortable width and its sidewalks, upon which we could at least walk single-file. There were other streets crossing it, which were little else than narrow cuts between buildings, and which gave one a first impression that they were private alleyways leading into some one's back yard. With hands extended, two men could reach across them. We saw carriages roll down the streets, and joined in the common impulse to hug the walls of the buildings in order to let them pass. An automobile, approching from a distance, looks as if it will sweep the entire width of the street, and inspires a quick concern for self-preservation; but, when one came along, we managed to let it pass without crushing us.

But still the narrow streets are picturesque, and interesting, leading a pleasing foreign flavor, that awakens in the imagination pictures of Europe and Asia. There are numbers of them named after saints, which attests the fact that the monks in the early days of St. Augustine were a very important factor.

There are one or two streets in St. Augustine, however, which are fairly wide. They are nicely paved with asphalt and other materials. In fact, the streets generally are well paved and well kept; except one which mars the front of the handsome Memorial church, erected by Mr. Flagler. They experimented with wooden blocks there; and, if any city wishes to economize by using wooden blocks, it would be well to dispatch an alderman or two to St. Augustine to take notes of the wooden paving blocks there.

The houses in the old quarter of St. Augustine are very quaint, most of them. They are, nearly all, built of a sand and shell composite stone, which they call "Coquina." They have overhanging balconies; the windows are small; the roofs are low; and the doors generally open upon the street, and on the same level. When the pitch of the rooms is considered, it is very evident that the old inhabitants had a different idea of comfort from that which we have nowadays. Judging from the outside, it seems as if a person could easily reach the ceiling with his hands. This may have been in the interests of the housewives in their efforts to keep down the cobwebs.

We passed a house placarded as being the oldest house in the United States. It is said to have been built by the monks of St. Sebastian in 1565. There is a fee of twenty-five cents charged for entering its hoary compartments. We soon learned, however, that there were several other houses that laid claim to this distinction of being the first building. In the space of one day we were not able to arbitrate between them, and called them all the oldest.

Opposite this particular house is a large building latterly used as barracks for the United States troops. It was formerly a convent, and our fancy peopled again the highwalled enclosure with its trains of hooded nuns moving softly to and fro about it.

It was here we first saw the "sea wall," a structure running a mile along the water front to protect the city from the force of the sea. It was built by the United States government about 1842; and is as solid as when first constructed. We bought oranges from a country market cart; and ate them as we walked along the boulevard by the wall. It was a picture of innocent enjoyment; but there were no spectators, for nobody but a determined sight-seer would have weathered the wind that was blowing in from the sea. The feathers that were in the ladies' hats were demolished and so was the calmness of their spirits.

In a short while we reached old Fort Marion, formerly known as Fort San Marco; and, finding a sunny shelter from the wind, on the drawbridge over the moat, we rested and looked about us with a deep interest. We were in the atmosphere of a romantic antiquity. The fort was completed in 1756, and the record is that it was one hunderd years in building. Its walls are of coquina, mined on Anastasia Island nearby. Over the entrance there is carved in stone the coat of arms of Spain, with an inscription below, celebrating its completion and paying fealty to the Spanish king and his generals.

The old builders had for their model a European castle; for in San Marco fort they made moat and drawbridge and porteulis; and there are bastions embrasures, a barbacon and other details of feudal strongholds.

We sat and munched more oranges, and talked of old Ponce de Leon and his expedition in 1513 to the land on which we rested, in search of the Fountain of Youth, which he had been told existed on the dreamy shores of eastern Asia. He thought he had reached Asia. Poor old man! His hopes were dashed by increasing years, and his search ended, not in the discovery of the fountain, but in death at the hands of savages. We thought of the original builder of San Marco, Menendez, who, in his religious zeal, massacred the French Hugenots, settled at a short distance away on the St. John's river, justifying his foul deed by proclaiming that he had done it, "Not as to Frenchmen, but as to Lutherans." And of the Frenchman, DeGourgues, who took it upon himself to avenge the blood of his countrymen by according the same treatment to the Spaniards. "Not as to Spaniards, but as to assassins."

We have read since our return of the wars in which old Fort Marco figured; in which English, French, Indians and Spanish in turn hurled their missiles against it.

It is remarkable how well preserved the fort is. It was hard to see where any work of repair had been done We regarded its condition as a commentary upon the destructive force of the instruments of warfare in former days of our history. If a modern battleship would stand in its harbor today and engage in some of its nice work for an hour, where would it be? It would be transformed into the dust of history.

The grounds about the fort are beautiful, with their broad lawns, shaded areas, and wide views of the harbor. We enjoyed strolling about them, until we started on a detour on the water side, and our ardor floated away a little on the wings of the wind. Little David did the running and gymnastics for the crowd; but he enjoyed it, and, while he was engaged in these sports, we were spared the pleasure of answering questions.

We rounded up our survey of the old town by standing in the ancient presence of the city gate. It is true to the pictures we have all seen of it. Only the pictures were taken at short range, and gave the impression that the walls were high. We wondered if the Indians in the early days had not learned to scale obstacles of such meagre height; else they would have certainly scorned the wall's protection. The wall extended across the peninsula upon which the city was built, and was designed to be a defense against the inroads of savages. However, the fragment of the city wall and its gate was interesting. It tells it tale of medieval life which no other town in the United States can boast of.

Altogether, St. Augustine is a most interesting place; with its quaint buildings and streets, that were ancient when Andrew Jackson first visited it as governor of the Floridas in 1821; with its hotels, churches and residences, that are costly and of charming Spanish types of architecture; with its public square about which the people gather in the evenings and listen to the music of a band, as they do in Europe; with the cathedral and its unique sundial, and its pew lists of names which seem to belong to old Castile; with its beautiful harbor, whose sapphire waters sparkle as brilliantly in the sunlight as those of Italy; with the picturesque island nearby, its lighthouse decorated as a barber's pole; with the many links which it has to connect the present with the dim past; and with its charming climate which the throngs of winter visitors revel in as a luxury of highest value.

In the evening we boarded the train homeward bound, feeling that the day spent in the old city was well worth the travel of so many hundreds of miles.

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